

Testimony of Hannah Middleton, Stonington High School Student.

Good evening Co-Chair Gerrantana, Co-Chair Dillon, Co-Chair Somers, and sub-committee members. My name is Hannah Middleton and I am a Junior at Stonington High School. I am an active member of the Adolescent Learning & Leadership Institute (ALLI) that was created by Southeastern Regional Action Council (SERAC). ALLI has given me the confidence to attend a multi-state Youth2Youth High School Prevention conference for the last 2 years with SERAC scholarships. My experience at this conference motivated me co-facilitate tobacco education programs in our elementary schools. I am asking that SERAC's funding not be cut due to the impact that these youth programs have had directly on my High School experience and future goals.

These programs mean everything to me. This is the only youth prevention I know about and it has really opened my eyes. At first, I joined because my school requires volunteer hours and this seemed interesting to meet kids outside of my school. However, at my first meeting Freshman year, I saw so many kids passionate about this group and so passionate about prevention. It was not only passionate kids but inspirational adults, dedicating their time to motivate the youth to change their community and get their voices heard.

As youth, we learn how to make a difference in our home towns and the larger community; such as advocating to local legislators and officials for more protection against the problems related to gambling expansion. I do not know how this opportunity could be replicated without SERAC. There is nothing else here in our area like ALLI and our school is trying to build up our own school club so we can bring the work back to Stonington High School, outside of the larger meetings. We are going to make change in our schools. The staff at SERAC have helped us get our School Administrators to support our work. It has shown me how to be a leader in Stonington and how to set myself apart from the negative influences. Most importantly, how to get this message to my peers and get them involved. This group has opened so many doors for me and I'm so grateful.

Please consider the impact this agency has had on my High School experience and plans for my future. These opportunities can't be replaced if the budget cuts are approved to Regional Action Councils. The budget cuts will eliminate more than our Leadership program; they will remove our inspiration to change the world we live in.

Sincerely,

Hannah Middleton